

# Decoding Buildings in Vernacular Settlements: Architectural and Cultural Characteristics of Baroda Central Library, India.

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## Abstract

Education and literacy are hallmarks of progressive societies. Public libraries play an important role in education and literacy while simultaneously reflecting and shaping society. Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III, a former ruler of the Indian state of Baroda and a firm believer in education and literacy established a public library system in the late 1800s. Two important consequences of his efforts have been the introduction of free primary education for girls and boys, and the establishment of the architecturally significant Baroda Central Library in 1931. This paper explores the impact of Maharaja's educational, religious, and socio-cultural reforms on the architecture of the Baroda Central Library in India.

This research provides a historical overview of education and library development in India during the pre-independence and post-independence periods. It examines the reforms initiated by the Maharaja and their influence on the establishment of institutional buildings, particularly the Baroda Central Library. Through a case study, this paper documents and represents the physical context of the library and the innovative architectural features using narratives, photographs, and drawings-methods that align with traditional and modern documentation techniques for cultural heritage. The study validates its findings through historical records and literature.

The research links Maharaja's reforms to the physical nature of the library and the symbolism embodied in its design. The Baroda Central Library reflects the vision Maharaja: inclusivity, adaptability and progress, which serve as a cultural anchor for the community. This paper concludes that the library is a testament to the vernacular settlements anchoring cultural identity of the community in a geographical space shaped by colonial influences and a princely vision.

**Keywords:** Architectural Characteristics, Cultural Heritage, Colonial Influence, Princely Vision, Reforms, Public Library, Symbolism

## Introduction

Education for the liberal, spiritual and religious upliftment of people and the society at large has been prevalent in India since ancient times. However, the nature of its manifestations has taken different forms during different periods of time. In fact, these periods have produced different institutions from time to time, which have collectively contributed to the way in which education exists in India today. The different periods of this history is constituted of the pre-independence period and the post-independence period. They could be identified as follows.

### Pre-Independence Period

- The Ancient Period (Before 1200 AD)
- The Medieval period (1200 AD – 1757 AD)
- The British Period (1757 – 1947 AD)

Post-Independence Period (1947 – 1960) (Bhatt, 2020).

### Pre-Independence Period

The pre-independence period encompassed three distinct eras as listed above. The first of this is the ancient period before 1200 AD, and this period consists of two dominant education systems: The Vedic system (1000 BC to 600 BC) and the Buddhist system (700 BC to 500 BC). According to Chandramani (2017), the Vedic system has been based on religious and holistic developments and has been secular and open to all.

The medieval period from 1200-1757 AD in contrast has been a result of the Muslim invasion in India, transforming the Vedic and Buddhist education systems. According to Srivastava (2017), the Islamic education system incorporated the Quran and focused on the “development of practical skills for cultural, economic and social cohesion”.

This has been followed by the British period from 1757-1947 AD, which began after the arrival of the British East India Company that expanded its domain to administration and politics, becoming the key decision makers for India. According to Sindhuja & Honnedevehthana (2021), it marked the introduction of Western education, changing the dynamics of the ancient and medieval education systems that have been already prevalent in India. As to be expected, each era has brought unique philosophies and structures, shaping the foundation of the history of Indian education.

### Post-Independence Period

As discussed by Hossain (2018), the post-Independence period from 1947-1960 has been a time when India acquired political and administrative freedom from the British rule. Indeed, it has been a crucial time for India and had focused on nation building. Education has been an important vehicle for bringing social, political, and economic changes in this transitional period in the Indian history. According to Wani (2008), the national goals of the Indian constitution has been democracy, secularism, elimination of poverty and national integration and education has played a very significant role in this endeavour.

As to be expected, education is invariably linked to books and places for the storage of books and making them available to the public. The institutions called the ‘libraries’ had come into being by that time and the society had recognised the significance of libraries in education at all levels. Thus, in India, not only did the libraries come into being but a whole library movement. In this connection, Nagar (1969) points out that libraries play a vital role in education as sources of archived knowledge for scholars and future generations. Indeed, according to Nagar (1969), the library movement in India started in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD and can be broadly categorized into pre-independence and post-independence period. It is in this context that Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III becomes an important role player in the making of the libraries and the library movement. Indeed, the ruler Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III had brought about numerous reforms during his reign from 1875 - 1939.

Sayajirao Gaekwad III has been born as Gopalrao Gaekwad in 1863 in the Indian state of Maharashtra to a farmer, distantly related to Maharaja Khanderao Gaekwad II, the ruler of

the then Baroda state, who died without leaving behind a male heir. Maharani Jamnabai, the widow of Maharaja Khanderao had adopted Gopalrao and had crowned him as Sayajirao Gaekwad III, at the age of 12. As Nagar (1992) and Gaekwad (1989) point out, through private schooling under the directorship of F. A. Elliot with British teachers, Sayajirao Gaekwad acquired education with a blend of western-style teaching buttressed by traditional knowledge.

Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III has faced significant challenges to his desire for reforms. Widespread illiteracy, had been prompted by religious and superstitious beliefs, and had been reinforced by societal norms such as the caste system, patriarchy, purdah system, child marriages, and public health issues.

The caste system in India had divided the society into four classes: the Brahmins (priests and gurus), the Kshatriyas (warriors and administrators), the Vaishyas (merchants and agriculturists), and the Shudras (labourers). Unfortunately, people's access to education and other social services has been dictated by their class. At the same time, patriarchy had permeated all classes, with men holding superior positions. The purdah system had dictated where women could be seen in the public, and how they had to cover their head and face with veils. Child marriages had been common in all the classes. In fact, widowed women had been ill-treated and had not been allowed even to remarry. In this connection, Upadhyay (2016) points out that these societal structures had posed significant obstacles to Sayajirao's reforms, underscoring the complex interplay between traditional customs and modernization efforts in late 19th and early 20th century princely India.

From 1887 to 1937, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III has travelled extensively to Europe, America, Asia and Africa. He has regarded travel as the highest form of education. As Upadhyay, (2016) shows, the tours had encouraged him to think broadly and had helped modernize his own state, by abolishing some societal ills prevalent in all the classes.

### **Reforms of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III and their Impact on the Society**

Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III had believed that religious beliefs, superstition, and limited access to education contributed to backward thinking and narrow mindsets that prevailed among all the classes of the society. In fact, he had understood that social, cultural religious and political changes would be needed to modernize Baroda. However, he also had realized that a rational approach, starting with education, rather than sudden reforms would be a better way to achieve that goal (Upadhyay, 2016).

### **Education for All**

One of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad's first reforms has been to make education mandatory for all the classes of the society for both boys and girls. Upadhyay (2016) says that in 1875, the Gujarati and Marathi schools were established in Baroda to encourage girls education and to improve the position of women in the society.

### **Religious Reforms**

Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III has also challenged the orthodoxy, superstitious beliefs, customs, and rituals followed in the society. According to Doniger (2023), he has abolished "Sati Pratha", an Indian custom where a wife immolates herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband, a practice that was prevalent in the Brahmin and Kshatriya community at that time and lasted until very recent times.

### **Social Reforms**

The Maharaja has also believed in equality. Indeed, he has opposed the taboo that the Shudra caste were untouchables and has introduced laws that gave them access to public spaces. He has abolished the Purdah system and has encouraged his wife Maharani Chimnabai II to educate herself. Indeed, he has supported her initiatives of improving the position of women in the society by allowing the widows to remarry, allowing inter-caste marriages, and banning all forms of child marriages (Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad 3, 2005)

## Cultural Reforms

Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III was a noted patron of arts. During his reign, Baroda state became a centre for artists and scholars. A great deal of attention has been given to art, architecture and performing arts to educate people and to construct a progressive society. Indeed, he has created a platform for the native and foreign artists to share their art forms. As Upadhyay (2016) shows, he has used art and architecture as a modernization tool marking Baroda State as a Cultural Capital known as “*Sanskarnagari*”.

## Political Reforms

As discussed by Gaekwad (1989), Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III has believed that good governance was the core of good administration. Thus, he has established policies and laws to eliminate the administrative corruption and malpractices he observed. Some of these actions included:

- Implementing justice-oriented policies and laws in agriculture, industry and finance.
- Imposing land acts to eliminate exploitation of farmers.
- Reducing taxes.

## Health Reforms

Indeed, health and hygiene have been of prime importance to Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III. Therefore, he has established the Baroda Medical Department in 1876 to make health facilities and programs available to all the classes of the society. The Baroda Civil Hospital has thus been established soon after. Simultaneously, public health initiatives, such as vaccines and general well-being programs have been promoted. Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III has also embarked on a campaign of civic and community projects that had included parks, museums, roads, dams and reservoirs to supply water to the city, and the Bank of Baroda (Gaekwad, 1989).

## Foundation of the Libraries in Baroda

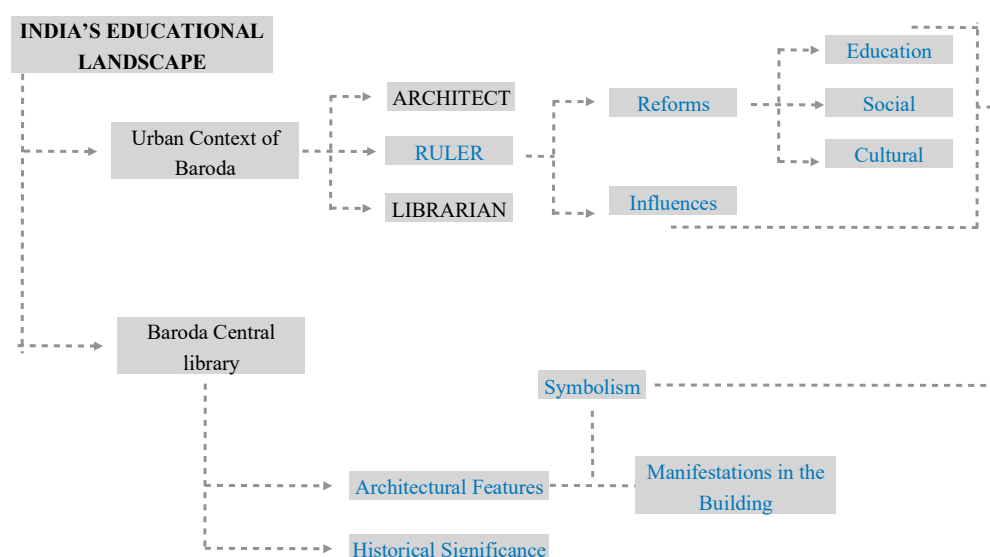
Unsurprisingly, the establishment of the library has been one of the most outstanding achievements of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III. This is because he has believed that the best way to enlighten people about world events was by establishing public libraries. Inspired by his 1906 visit to the United States, he has established a public library system in the Baroda State. Under the guidance of William Borden, director of Young Men’s Institute Library at Yale University, they planned a comprehensive network of libraries, that included the Baroda Central Library, district libraries, town libraries, and village libraries. The system has offered unique features such as the ladies’ library and the children’s facilities. Despite initial challenges, including public resistance to usage fees, Borden has proposed reforms to revitalize the system. These has included unifying collections, constructing purpose-built facilities, and offering free access. As Nagar (1969) says, the Maharaja’s support for these initiatives, coupled with Borden’s expertise, has laid the foundation for a modern library system in Baroda, demonstrating the commitment of the state to public education and knowledge dissemination in the early 20th century India.

In this context, this paper examines the Baroda Central Library. Its aim is to unravel the historical context of education and library development in India, and to understand the architectural and cultural significance of the Baroda Central Library.

Its objectives are:

- To reveal educational and socio-cultural reforms of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III.
- To identify the architectural and symbolic representations of the Baroda Central Library.
- To ascertain the role of the library as a cultural anchor in the context of colonial and princely influences.

Indeed, the research focuses on the historical development of education and libraries in India from pre-1200 AD to 1960 AD, examining the educational systems, transformative processes, and the evolution of libraries. It explores the progression from traditional documentation methods to organized public libraries, highlighting the significant role of educational institutions in societal development, with a specific emphasis on the reforms initiated by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III in the princely state of Baroda. Following Figure shows the educational landscape of Bahrain has been instrumental in manifestation of the social, cultural and educational facets in the library of Baroda.



### Research Methods:

This research employs a multiplicity of methods and techniques to gather data. First and foremost, it is a case study of a single building, which is under occupation. It documents the physical fabric of the library building as it exists today by means of physical observations and measured drawings. It generates the historical information related to the library building through archival records and documentary research. Sketching is employed as an architectural technique of observation, recording and analysis of the forms and the spaces of the building which is complemented by the information gathered from secondary sources such as published literature. The authors had physically observed the building and its surroundings as well as the interiors which are reflected upon in order to generate insights about the character and the quality of the building.

### The Case study

#### Baroda Central Library

“There is no more ennobling thing than reading of good books; It leads men along flowery pathways, towards earnest and pure lives. I am doing what I can to educate my people to the stage where they can read and appreciate great thoughts of the present and of the past, and the result so far has been very gratifying; But I would do more; I would bring to the poor man or woman, the ordinary man of the bazaar, to the common people everywhere, this wealth of literature now only known to the educated”.

Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad, April 1912 (Nagar, 1992).

The purpose of the case study is to explore, document and study the history, context, and architectural features of this public library through narratives, photographs and drawings.



## The Site

As shown in the Figure 2, the city of Baroda is located on the Vishwamitri River in the state of Gujarat in the Centre-West of India. The historic walled city sits within the fortified walls that form a square with 800 meters on each side divided into four quadrants. Four gates exist facing the cardinal directions: Lehripura gate to the West, Champaner gate to the South, Pani gate to the East, and Gendi gate to the South, connected by two 12-meter-wide roads: Mahatma Gandhi Road (East-West) and Mandvi Fatehpura Road (North-South). The historically significant Mandvi Pavilion that commemorates the establishment of the Gaekwad rule, sits at the intersection as shown in the Figure 3. Important administrative buildings including the Baroda Central Library, Sarkarwada, and the former Nazarbaug Palace, line these main roads. Inspired by the impact of the St. Louis Central Library during his 1910 visit to Missouri, U.S.A., Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III positioned the Baroda Central Library centrally on Mandvi Fatehpura Road, marking it a defining feature of the city (Nagar, 1969).



**Fig. 1:** The Baroda Central Library

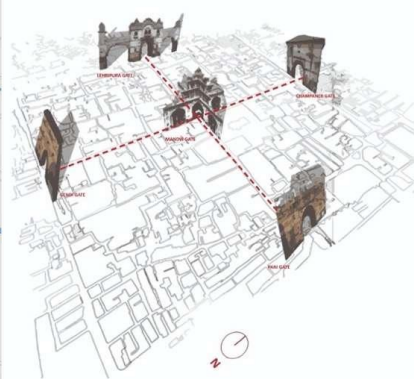
Source: Author, 2024

## History

Ballaney (1992) describes Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III, as an avid collector and reader of books who transformed his personal collection into the foundation for the public library system of Baroda. The vision of Maharaja extended beyond a mere book collection to encompass broader educational goals for all the citizens. His appreciation for architecture has led him to commission Edwin Lutyens, an English architect, renowned for his Indo-Saracenic designs, to create the Baroda Central Library in 1910 as shown in the Figure 1. Nagar (1992) argues that this decision reflects the commitment of Maharaja to blending cultural heritage with modern functionality, illustrating his holistic approach to public institutions and education in early 20th century princely India.



**Fig. 2:** Fortified old city of Baroda.  
Source: Sketch by the Author, 2023



**Fig. 3:** The old city of Baroda and its gates.  
Source: Sketch by the Author, 2024.

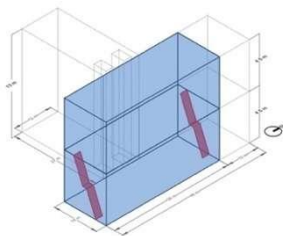
## Findings

### Style of Architecture

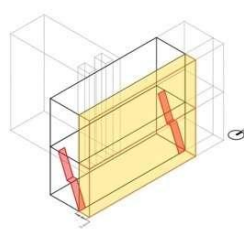
Jain (2022) describes that during the British Colonial Period (*The British rule under the Crown from 1857 till 1947*), the British rulers wanted to create architectural styles that represented the rich cultural heritage of India while incorporating their own European influences. Towards the end of 1880s, Charles Mant, Robert Chisholm, Edwin Lutyens and some other British architects in India have tried to create a new skyline. The architectural style adapted for the public buildings of importance like libraries, museums, schools, courthouses and hospitals has been the Indo-Saracenic style. The introduction of the Indo-Saracenic design style has been driven by a combination of cultural representation, power dynamics, aesthetic preference and practical considerations related to climate and local resources. According to Ballaney (1992), the style remains an important part of the architectural heritage of India.

### Massing of the Building

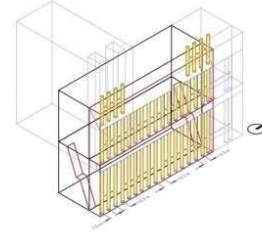
The library building is divided into two rectangular blocks. One for the Lending Section and other for the Reference Section. These blocks form a T-shaped building, with a central axis dividing it symmetrically from the centre.



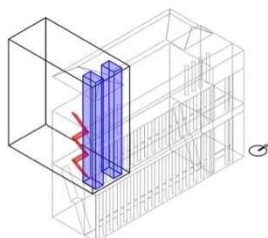
**Fig 4.1:** Two storied lending section.



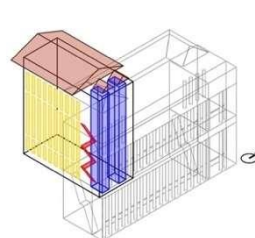
**Fig 4.2:** Semi-enclosed Verandah.



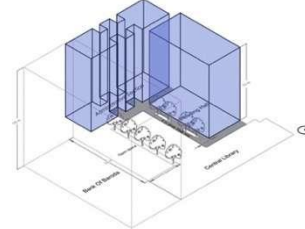
**Fig 4.3:** Vertical Columns.



**Fig 4.4:** Light wells.



**Fig 4.5:** Reference Section.



**Fig. 4.6:** Later additions  
Reading Hall

Source: Axonometric views drawn by the Author, 2024.

The architecture of the Baroda Central Library comprises three main sections:

- Lending Section: Measures 48.0 x 14.0 meters runs parallel to Mandvi Fatehpura Road, with two floors connected by 1.5-meter-wide staircases, a semi-enclosed verandah, and series of decorative wooden columns resonating the façade of 'Sarkarwada'.
- Reference Section: A double-height block running perpendicular to the Lending Section measuring 27.0 x 12.0 meter with a staircase and two light wells, covered by a gable roof. Raised glass walls of the light wells allows ample natural light.
- Additions Post 1930s: A two-story Reading Hall to the north and Administrative Section to the west, partially altering the original design's emphasis on natural light.

## Influence of Indo-Saracenic style in Baroda Central Library



**Fig.5:** Facade of the Baroda Central Library.

Source: Drawn by the Author, 2024.

The Baroda Central Library exemplifies key elements of the Indo-Saracenic style, blending Indian and European architectural features. Its 48-meter-long symmetrical façade, divided into three parts, echoes the linearity found in other significant Baroda buildings as shown in the Figure 5.

Indo-Saracenic influences:

- Wooden columns with sculptural capitals
- Cast-iron jaalis (perforated screens) for light filtration and ventilation
- Deep-set verandahs and shaded balconies for climate adaptation
- Overhanging eaves and recessed windows (Grover, 2004) & (Burhani, 2023).

### Ground Floor

The Baroda Central Library's ground floor exemplifies thoughtful spatial organization and circulation design:

- **Structure:** The structure of the library is composite with R.C.C (Reinforced Concrete Cement) framework with load-bearing walls.
- **Entry:** The entry to the library is through a 3.0-meter wide semi-covered verandah with three entrances.
- **Layout:** The central lending section is flanked by reading areas on either side. A 2.2 meters wide passageway divides the lending section and the storage room and connects the verandah straight to the open space behind as shown in figure 6.
- **Circulation:** The centrally placed primary entry to the verandah is meant for visitors. The linear movement through the length of the verandah allows freedom to access spaces. Staircases placed at the end on either side of the lending section facilitate vertical movement.



**Fig. 6:** Ground Floor Plan showing the spatial organization of spaces.

Source: Drawn by the Author, 2023.



## First Floor

According to the observations, the first floor of the Baroda Central Library has a thoughtful design that focusses on the social needs and promotes inclusivity:

- **Spatial Organization:** The floor has spaces designated for children and women. In a patriarchal set-up, these gender specific spaces created safe havens for women and the mothers. In contrast to the ground floor, this floor contains spatial distinctions built of partition walls. The walls help in creating three separate spaces: the children's and women's section, the reading room and the screening room as shown in the Figure 7.
- **Circulation:** The floor is accessed through two staircases from the ground floor veranda. The movement is linear with easy transition from one space to the other. The semi-open corridors serve as the central mechanism by which visitors may go from one room to another. This floor is connected to the Reference Section by a 2.0-meter-wide passage flanked by two light wells.



**Fig. 7:** First Floor Plan showing the spatial organization of spaces.  
Source: Author, 2023.

## Reference Section and Stacking System

Arya (2022) describes the Reference Section of the Baroda Central Library as a warehouse with advanced library technology for its time:

- **Structure:** The reference Section measures 10.0 m x 20.0 m is a fireproof warehouse-like self-supported masonry wall structure devoid of projections and ornamentalations, that houses the 4 tier stacking system as shown in figure 8.1.
- **Lighting:** Natural light from strategically placed windows and light wells.
- **Stacking System:** As shown in figure 8.2, the stacking system is a prefabricated steel structure imported from the USA and assembled on site. The building block and the stacking system stand independent of each other. The stacking system in the reference section was designed and manufactured by J. Snead & Co. in the USA. The company were pioneers in library equipment. The stacking system is fireproof, compact, durable and capable of expansion vertically and horizontally (Nagar M. L., 1992). The kit of parts of the system are prefabricated and finished with a primary coating of gray paint to avoid rusting. The standard height of a single tier stack is 7 feet. Linseed oil trays for termite prevention. Belgium glass flooring for light transmission and temperature control. Wood dumbwaiter for book transfer between floors.
- **Flooring:** The floors of the 4 tier Stacking System is covered in Belgian glass tiles that are 2 inches thick as shown in figure 8.3.

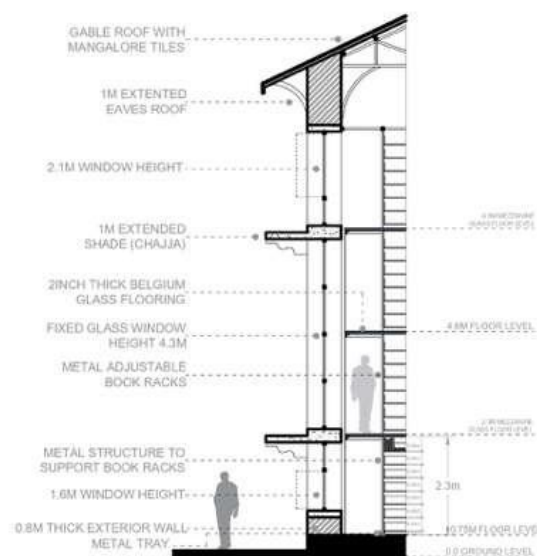
According to Ballaney (1992), this design demonstrates library's technology with thoughtful architectural solutions. The independent stacking system, specialized flooring, and natural lighting exemplifies a forward-thinking approach to preservation of books of knowledge.



**Fig. 8.1:** Section of the Reference Section showing the 4-tier stacking system.  
Source: Author, 2024.



**Fig. 8.2:** 1.2-meter-wide passage and 2-inch-thick Belgium glass measuring 90 cm x 75 cm.  
Source: Author, 2024.



**Fig. 8.3:** Section of the 4-tier Multi-tier Stacking System of Reference Section.  
Source: Author, 2024.

## Adaptations

Through observations, one can conclude that there have been changes over the years. The railings on the facade of the library has had to be strengthened due to wear and tear of the passage of time. The impact of noise from the road has increased due to the traffic congestion and many temporary retail activities on the pavement, and illegal parking on the roadside, making the road narrower and chaotic. Noise pollution and probably dust has led to corrugation on the railings and has fluted columns weakening them. As shown in the Figure 9, in 2015 - 2016 the railings have been strengthened by adding wood columns between each two fluted columns in the veranda that were supported by a horizontal wood member below the original beam. Furthermore, to avoid the railings from falling off, jalis have been added on the ground floor veranda, to hold the balustrade of the railing and anchor it well with the beam above. The railings have been further anchored by bolting them to the columns.

Interestingly, funding for the maintenance of the Baroda Central Library has come from the state government of Gujarat, with nominal membership fees ensuring that access to the library is open for all classes of people irrespective of their economic status. Moreover, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III has donated books from his private collection that he had bought or had been gifted to him from his trips abroad to the library and had made sure that they were accessible for the people to read and have a worldview.



Fig. 9: Sketch showing the view of the library 'then' and 'now'.

Source: Sketch by the Author, 2024.

## Discussion

This discussion analyzes the Baroda Central Library as a physical manifestation of the reform agenda of Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III. They are as follows.

- Explore the connection between the Maharaja's educational, religious, social, and cultural reforms and the library's design and functionality.
- Interpret the symbolism embedded in the building's design.

## The Reforms

In the time before the reforms of the Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III, education in the State of Baroda, and most of India, has been limited to men of a certain class. His fundamental reform that has led to widespread cultural and societal changes has been his platform of "education for all", including women and men from all the classes of the society. While much of this reform has been accomplished through the establishments of public schools for the boys and the girls, the establishment of the library system has also had a key role in these reforms.

In fact, the Central Library of Baroda has supported the "education for all" reform in several important ways as follows.

1. Its location in the center of the town has marked it as a public service space, as opposed to a concealed academic or segregated religious space.

2. The use of a multi-story colonnade on the facade with its impressive jalis signalled more openness and historical authenticity than a solid facade in the European style, making the building more welcoming and less formidable to the ordinary Indian citizens.
3. The library has offered a variety of spaces, resources and services that have been open to all the citizens, regardless of their class, literacy, or language ability. Educational resources has included reference books, newspapers and magazines, lectures, movies, maps, and even picture postcards for those not able to read.
4. The library promoted education for children, with spaces and resources set aside for them.
5. The Baroda Central Library has marked a shift towards gender equality by offering accommodation for women, including a dedicated entrance for women with a separate staircase leading to the women's section of the library.

However, the layout of the library has continued to consolidate the concept of the *Purdah* or keeping women out of sight from men. While accommodating women has been viewed as progress toward gender equality and the Gaekwad's vision of "education for all", the physical separation of men and women in the library has unfortunately reinforced the subordinate status of women in the Indian society at that time. Indeed, from a modern, 21st-century perspective informed by mid-20th century global civil rights movements, such segregation perpetuated the marginalization of women. Nevertheless, the design of the Baroda Central Library, in its day, has been an important manifestation of the reform of "education for all" promoted by Gaekwad.

## Symbolism

Terry Webb, the author of the book "Building libraries for the 21st Century" states:

"Symbolic Librarianship is the little portion of library practice that acknowledges the library as a system of symbols and calls for proper management of those symbols as an important part of a library's resources. It is the ability to interpret, be sensitive to, and build upon public perception of a library as a societal asset that is as much symbolic as functional."

Southwell, 2015; Kaser, 2001.

Symbolism is as important as functionality. The strategic location, composite structure, linear facade, high plinth, flushed entry doorways, repetitive columns in the verandah, cast iron railings and jaalis and the interior spaces of the Baroda Central Library have high symbolic values.

## The Location

The strategic location of the Baroda Central library in the historic walled city is within the fortified walls that form a square divided into four quadrants with two principal roads. The library sits on the Mandvi-Fatehpura Road that runs on the North-South axis, showing prominence and accessibility to all. The perspectival linear form of the building running parallel to the main road shows the importance of the building to the people. The absence of a ceremonial foreground to access the library, unlike many important buildings like the Parliament building in New Delhi designed by the Luytens and other government buildings, expresses humility and humbleness and shows acceptance for all.

## The Façade

As mentioned earlier, when India became part of the British empire, the architecture has been an amalgamation of power and prominence. Hence, the British architects have consciously started incorporating Indian elements into their buildings to evolve an expression

that would suit the Indian context by adapting features like verandahs, screens (Jaalis) and weather sheds. The expression has been neither Indian nor European but an interesting mixture of the two, called the Indo-Saracenic architecture.

As can be seen, the Baroda Central Library is a combination of Indo-Saracenic architecture together with a nineteenth century Neo-classical façade (Ballaney, 1992). The linearity of the facade has been accentuated with the repetition of columns which signifies that knowledge is seamless. The facade is divided with a central flushed jaali door with six circular wood columns on each side spaced at around 2.0 m distance which signifies balance, symmetry and stability as shown in the Figure 15. The idea of stretching the building along the main axis has been for a common man to feel the building merging with the landscape.

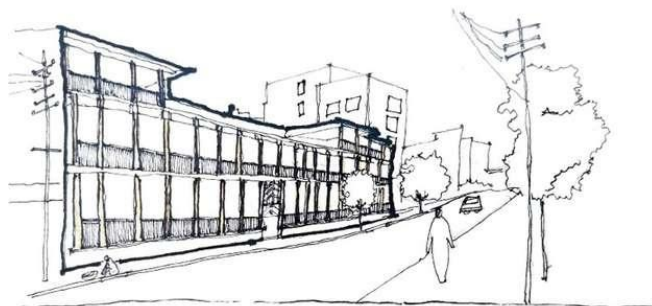
### The Plinth

The steps leading to the plinth of the library as shown in the figure 15, symbolizes the sacredness of the building as a 'temple of knowledge'. Just as temples and many other sacred structures are elevated from the ground, the high plinth of the library suggests that knowledge is important and needs to be respected.

### The Doorway

The three entry points from the main road axis to the verandah promotes inclusivity, and shows accommodation of diverse gender identities, ensuring that all are comfortable and respected. The design of all the three doors is the same, which also suggests equality. This expresses the prestige and importance of the library building. The central door has been mainly used by men, probably reflecting on the social hierarchy and power of men being superior to women. The side doors, however, have been used by women and children marking their limited visibility but giving them freedom to access the library without any interruption.

### The Veranda & the Columns



**Fig. 10:** Linearity of the building.  
Source: Sketch by the Author, 2024.

As shown in the Figure 10, the verandah on the Eastern facade of the Baroda Central library has repetitive fluted wood circular columns signifying that knowledge is infinite and learning is perennial. Wood symbolizes strength and stability, the circular fluted columns evoke a sense of timelessness and tradition, and the repetitive nature represents wisdom, a sense of order and harmony. The continuity of the columns symbolizes that the building is a repository of knowledge, hence the columns support the heavy weight of knowledge that is contained.

Banana flowers as shown in the Figure 11.1, are associated with fertility, auspiciousness and prosperity. In Hindu customs, banana flowers are used in weddings, housewarming rituals and religious festivals either offered as offerings to deities or used for decorations. The symbolic value of the banana flower motif used on both sides of the capital of the columns signifies symmetry, harmony, balance with the built. They demonstrate a sense of sacredness to the space and serve as a reminder to keep the old Hindu customs and cultural traditions alive as shown in the Figure 11.2. This is an important aspect for the people who feel that they can call the building their own.



**Fig 11.1:** Sketch of the banana flower.**Fig 11.2:** Capital of Column.

Source: Author, 2024.

The capital of the column is decorative with the motif of a banana flower and is seen on the ground floor level columns. The first-floor level columns are now simple with no embellishments showing simplicity and humbleness, making it accessible for all the classes of people. This is probably because of the direct entry to the ground floor level from the main road, a reminder that this is the fountain of knowledge, inviting the public to enter and access the building (Southwell, 2015; Kaser, 2001). The first floor meant for women and children is more subdued in its presence now, access to which is from a straight wood flight staircase sandwiched between the two parallel walls, safeguarding the privacy of women and children. The bases of the columns on the ground floor level and the first-floor level do not have ornamentation but a simple pedestal. This probably signifies that each one who steps inside the library comes with the aim to learn something from the beginning. The building does not exuberate pomp or grandeur through architecture or any elements, but it simply expresses infinity of knowledge contained.

### The Railings & the Jaalis

The railings and the jaalis express the idea of connectivity with the outside world and the world of knowledge within. Their transparency suggests access and inclusivity, apart from serving as a functional component. Indeed, they add aesthetic value to the library with their decorative pattern and placement as shown in figure

The railings line the veranda of the ground floor level and balcony on the first-floor level giving a sense of safety to the people walking along the corridor. The pattern of the railing on both the levels are decorative but are not the same. The decorative patterns on the ground floor and the first floor show a pattern of fluidity and interconnectedness of different branches of knowledge. One of the reasons the library had metal jaalis above the railings was for security. It also provided safety from the birds (specially pigeons) entering the veranda and potentially creating a menace. Another reason was to enhance the linear facade of the library with its horizontal bands, symbolizing infinity.

### Interior spaces

The inside spaces of the library, comprised of volumetric spaces, the flooring, the furniture layout, the ambience of the reading room, the skylights, the transparent Belgium glass floors, and the books shelves all convey a sense of timelessness, and a feeling of being lost in the world of knowledge. Interestingly, the Baroda Central Library is the only library to have used Belgium glass floors in the Reference Section, a time when glass was considered a piece of crockery. This indicates the advancement of technology being introduced in a state where its people have not been aware of the technology. Glass floors symbolize blurring of class and gender.

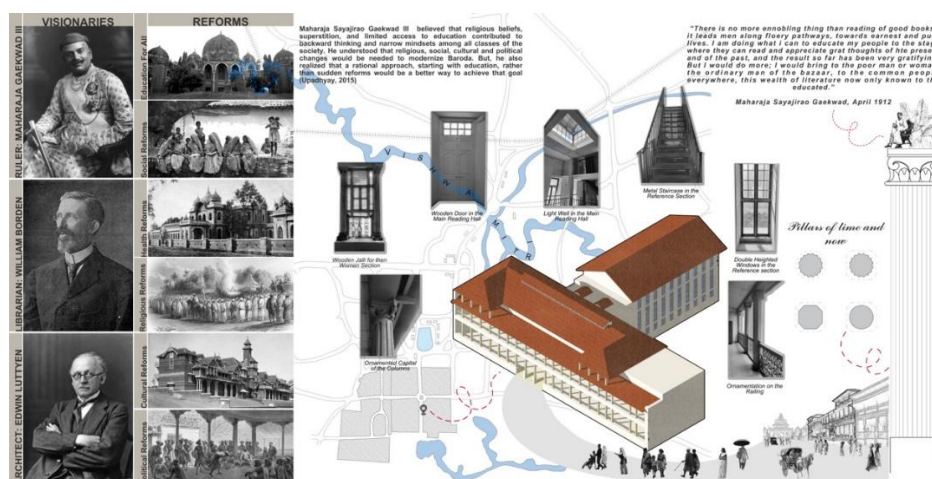
The decorative wood cupboards lined against the wall in the reading area of the main hall of the lending section allows readers the space and variety to select books of their interests. The arrangement expresses fluidity, encouraging readers to spend more time. The reading tables with a seating capacity of 14 - 16 readers encourage readers to interact and hold discourses that

would blur the gender biases and create room for holistic learnings. The light wells in the reference section give a sense of space that is illuminating knowledge and wisdom when one enters. It also symbolizes the idea of enlightenment and an everlasting ray of hope.

## Conclusion

This research reveals that Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad's educational, religious and social and cultural reforms are a testament to his vision for the Baroda Central library. His intellect and good knowledge of library architecture brought a successful conclusion along with an aesthetic architectural achievement (Southwell, 2015).

The architectural style of the library not only reflects the combination of Indo-Saracenic and Neo-Classical styles but also symbolizes inclusivity and adaptability. In fact, the frequent visits of Maharaja abroad have not been merely meant for leisure, but his agenda has been to inculcate some of the social and cultural ways of living to his state. For example, The effects of his visits and the influence of western world can be seen in every part of the Indian state, from buildings, water works, educational institutions to a tea pot. Probably many of these would have come due to the influence of the European architects but at least a few were certainly from Maharaja's personal choice.



**Fig. 11.3:** Collage work

Source: Drawn by the Author, 2024.

If one considers the architecture of the library building, it is clear that Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III, wanted the architecture of the library to merge with the immediate surroundings rather than to make the building look imperial. The idea has been to make the architecture of the building look less imposing, thus making it accessible to all age groups and all genders. Hence, architects have worked within the social and cultural framework that has respected the context at that time. Interestingly, as Ballaney (1992) describes, one of the most symbolic intentions of the British Architects has been to satisfy the Indian rulers by designing buildings that displayed power and might and the notion of superiority. Hence, the architects may have not been able to reflect their personal choices and beliefs but rather have worked under the larger framework of social and cultural beliefs prevalent at the time.

It is also important to understand the fact that the British government has had a strong hold over the Indian states, that has made a lot of the rulers at their mercy. However, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III, has been very vocal about the wrongdoings of the British government and has challenged their authority and advocated for the well-being of his people. Though he has believed in a lot of good learnings and attributes of the West, which he has tried to imbibe in his people, Maharaja has still believed that some of the ways of their governing were not for the benefit of his people. In many of his lectures at various places, Maharaja has clearly

expressed displeasure and discontent with the same, and he has overridden their decisions and has done exactly what he thought was best for his people.

In conclusion, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III's vision has been a lens to understand his unwavering commitment to his educational, religious and social, and cultural reforms and high resistance against colonial oppression. Through his approach to architecture and governance, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad has left behind an undeniable legacy of progress for the future generations.

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